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## Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature

Kenneth J. Winkle  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

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[in Utah] are not even aware that people live here, thrive here, raise families here" (134–35). Esplin concludes the book by observing that the restoration of Nauvoo is "an American story" that offers important lessons on faith tourism, contested space, and commemoration (148).

The book's great strength is Esplin's ability to consistently situate his research within the broader scholarship of tourism and heritage studies, cultural studies (especially work focused on memory and commemoration), and the American Midwest. By doing so, the author demonstrates that the history of the Mormon faith is indeed uniquely American in its orientation. That history, like our national history, is messy at times, and Esplin does not minimize or gloss over those times. The book occasionally bogs down with minute details regarding property acquisition or church leaders' correspondence. Ultimately, however, Esplin provides a valuable text that would be of particular use to scholars interested in America's religious history, historic preservation in the Midwest, and the constantly contested nature of cultural memory.

*Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature*, by Ron J. Keller. The Concise Lincoln Library. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2019. xi, 160 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Kenneth J. Winkle is Thomas C. Sorensen Professor of American History at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He is the author of *Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* (2001).

In *Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature*, Ron J. Keller identifies the four terms that Abraham Lincoln served in the Illinois legislature from 1834 to 1842 as an oft-forgotten but formative period. Although born in Kentucky and destined for greatness—and an untimely death—while serving as president in Washington, D.C., Abraham Lincoln spent most of his life in the Midwest. As he grew up and came of age in the invigorating atmosphere of the American heartland, Lincoln imbibed the rural and small-town virtues that he later came to personify. In 1834, at age 25, he was a newcomer to central Illinois: poor, uneducated, and still uncertain of his trajectory in life. Settling in New Salem, a small pioneer village near Springfield, Lincoln seized the opportunity to prove himself to his new neighbors, who found in him an earnest if rough-hewn representative of their own values. Helping him to improve himself, they supported his pursuit of a political career with near unanimity. In short, Lincoln won his first elective office on the strength of his personal reputation for honesty, hard work, common sense, self-improvement, and community spirit.

Keller aptly portrays the foundation of Lincoln's earliest political inclinations as economic in nature. Representing Sangamon County in the lower house of the Illinois General Assembly, Lincoln advocated an active state government that would assist in the advancement of the western frontier region by supporting public education, establishing sound banks that would provide secure credit, and funding internal improvements such as roads, canals, and railroads. These economic initiatives drew him to the new Whig Party's "American System." Lincoln soon became the Whig floor leader in the Illinois House and later declared that he was "always a Whig in politics." Despite his party's perpetual minority status in Illinois, Lincoln grew adept at forging alliances, compromising, and mastering parliamentary procedure to get things done. As a member of the legislature's "Long Nine," he proved instrumental in securing the passage of an internal improvements program, establishing the Bank of Illinois, and relocating the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield—a more central location that was also the seat of Lincoln's home county, Sangamon. After a devastating depression, the Panic of 1839, left the Illinois economy in tatters, the Whig economic program collapsed under a debt that the state could not repay until 1881. Lincoln temporarily retired from politics after completing his fourth term in 1842. But at age 33, he left as one of the "elder statesmen" of his beloved Whig Party.

*Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature* is a welcome reconsideration of Lincoln's legislative career. It provides a fresh perspective on those eight momentous years in the future president's early life. While assessing Lincoln's legislative record as "less than stellar" (ix), Keller views glimmers of Lincoln's later opposition to slavery as pivotal and considers the long-term impact of Lincoln's legislative service on his personal, professional, and political growth as overwhelmingly positive. Lincoln's admission to the Illinois bar midway through his legislative career in 1837 and his subsequent move to Springfield to practice law—and to marry well—epitomize the dramatic self-improvement that Lincoln garnered as a lasting personal and professional legacy of his legislative service. Overall, Keller carefully recounts Lincoln's crucial transformation into a shrewd and effective political leader during his legislative career, the host of influential friends and political allies that he accrued, his growing eloquence as he honed his rhetorical skills, his ambition to attain ever greater public distinction, and above all his immersion into the uniquely American political principles that he would later define and defend as president.